Teaching Culture Through Literature: A Reader-Response Approach

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Abstract

Culture-integrated foreign language teaching holds an important place in foreign language education worldwide. The increasing awareness of cultural hybridity and the openness of cultural frontiers make an urgent call for an approach, which is compatible with a focus on the cultural context. The present paper attempts to vindicate that literature has many cultural implications if taught via a reader response approach. In addition to helping students develop an awareness of the target language culture, this approach calls for the participation of the reader, who brings to the text his experience and cultural knowledge in the interpretative process. In a reader response approach, meaning is constructed through a transaction/interaction between the reader and the text. Hence, the reading process opens a dialogue between cultures.

المستخلص

ان ادماج الثقافة في تعليم اللغة الاجنبية تتصدر مكانا مهما في تدريس اللغة الاجنبية عالميا. ان الوعي المتزايد بالهجانة الثقافية وانفتاح الحدود الثقافية قد فرض ضرورة تطبيق منهاج يتلاءم مع هدا التركيز على السياق الثقافي. ان هده المقالة تنين ان الادب له اثارا ثقافية عدة ادا درس عن طريق نظرية القراءة و التلقي. بالإضافة الى تمكين الطلبة من معرفة و زيادة وعيهم بالثقافة الاجنبية، فهدا المنهاج يدعو الى مشاركة القارئ في تحليل و تأويل النص الادبي. حسب نظرية القراءة و التلقي، فان المعنى يبنى عبر التفاعل بين القارئ و النص، و بين ثقافة القارئ و ثقافة الاديب. و بالتالي، فمرحلة القراءة تفتح حوارا بين الثقافات.

1- Literature and culture

Culture cannot be taught in a vacuum but in a context. This paper is based on the premise that literature provides such a context. Indeed, there are hosts of factors, which make literature very stimulating and motivating for learning. First, it appeals to students' emotions and passions. Second, literary texts provides students with a kind of vicarious life, and the communicative approach attempts to make learning in touch with the learner's socio-cultural context in order to make it more effective. Students learn better if they find affinities between what they learn and their experiences. In reading literature, students use their personal, historical and cultural background. In discussing the wide array of benefits the teaching of literature might bring about, the critic Servenaz Khatib writes:

> The availability of a generous resource of written material, the existence of fundamental and general themes shared by the majority of people of different cultures as universals, the presence of the potential to be related to by readers and to be associated with personal thoughts, emotions and experiences, the genuine authenticity of it and the vivid illustration of the lifestyles, cultures, beliefs and behaviors of the people of the target society are only some of the numerous and immeasurable advantages of using literature in EFL contexts.[1]

The critic Jeanne Connell, in his turn, lists two purposes that the teaching of literature might serve. In his view, "literature plays both an aesthetic role by emphasizing personal response, and an instrumental role by bringing readers the experience of others."[2]

Literary texts are viewed as cultural worlds since teaching foreign language literature entails teaching the culture of that language. The author is the antennae of his culture, and his work functions as a signifier of national and cultural identity. So, reading literary texts is likely to raise students' cultural awareness. According to Freda Mishan, "the role of literature and culture is today seen as a reciprocal one."[3] T.S Eliot evinces the role of literature in preserving culture. He writes: "But it must be remembered, that for the transmission of a culture-a peculiar way of thinking, feeling and behaving-and for its maintenance, there is no safeguard more reliable than a language. And to survive for this purpose it must continue to be a literary language."[4]

In the same vein, Yamuna Kachru and Larry E.Smith view literature as a means of understanding the nature of the foreign culture. According to them, literary texts "are a valuable source of sociocultural knowledge not easily recoverable from grammars, dictionaries, and textbooks."[5] Because they are

"'rooted in the culture' of their places of origin, they must represent "authentic" lifestyles, including styles of interaction. Thus, the cultural themes and patterns of verbal interactions contained in these works are of considerable value to scholars, researchers, and students of world Englishes. " (168) In this sense, reading literature is likely to enrich students' experience of the world and to indoctrinate them with the cultural knowledge of the society where the target language is spoken. The critic Louis Rosenblatt views literature as "a particularly important means of improving multicultural understanding. On the one hand it can help people to value their backgrounds. On the other hand it can help them to transcend their experience and to value other backgrounds and other individuals."[6]

Literature is a means whereby intercultural relationships can be forged in a world marked by difference and Otherness. Reading is an act of communication, which helps students come to a realization of the existence of cultural affinities and divergences. The critic Ezra Pound views literature as a medium for communicate with another culture. He states that "The whole of great art is a struggle for communication […] And this communication is not a levellling, it is not an elimination of differences. It is a recognition of difference, of the right of differences to exist, of interest in finding things different."[7] Hence, literature helps transgress cultural borders; nevertheless, separatedness and difference are invincible.

2- Reader-Response Approach to Teaching Literature

Reader response theory comes as a reaction to New Criticism, which stresses the objectivity of the literary text. New Critics view the text as an autotelic artifact, an autonomous entity, which has its own life. Hence, the critic should not divagate from the text, which is the main concern, to the life of the artist or the affect of the text on the reader. The intention of the author and the emotions of the reader are otiose. New Criticism, also, seeks to divert the reader's attention from the cultural and the socio-historical context that might interfere in the interpretative process. It calls for the "close reading' of the text.

Reader response approach entices students to respond to the text, giving vent to their pent up emotions and ideas. Unlike New Criticism, it promotes their personal involvement in the text, taking account of their socio-historical and cultural demarcations. For proponents of this theory, the text does not have a monolithic exclusive meaning, which is determined by the author, who depicts his life and experience in the act of writing. Meaning is constructed during and not prior to the act of reading. The author, who has long been deemed the sole creator of meaning, is no longer put at the top of the pecking order in literary interpretation. The reader, his experience and background are also germane to the

interpretative act. So, the text is not a hermetic, self-sufficient whole, which is immune from the author's and the reader's worlds.

According to reader response approach, which reverberates with the call for a learner-centered approach, it is the reader who generates meaning. The literary text does not have a single fixed meaning, but rather multifarious interpretations. Indeed, the reader does not look for a determined meaning; he constructs meaning in the reading process. The prominent figure in reader response theory, Stanley Fish, grants a key importance to the reader. He states that "the reader's response is not *to* the meaning; it is the meaning."[8] This meaning cannot be totally detached from the framework of the students' experience.

Rosenblatt spells out her vehement criticism of the traditional method of reading in which the student is a passive recipient of the ideas he finds in the text. She writes: "At fault, of course, is the conception of literary communication as a one-way process, with the passive reader being stimulated to respond emotionally, rather than to engage in an intellectually and emotionally active process, first, of literary recreation and, second, of critical reflection on that experience."[9] Indeed, the student's emotional response should not be equated with 'affective fallacy'. Affective fallacy, a term coined by the New Critics, implies a mere passive emotional response from the part of the student, who does not question the cultural aspects of the text and does not toil at understanding the text's far-reaching ramifications. Contrariwise, reader response approach seeks to engage the reader in an intellectual cogitation rather than imparting him directly with the meaning, thus giving him a more important role.

In discussing why a reader-response theory should be adopted, Rosenblatt highlights the role of the reader and the world he brings to the reading process. She writes:

> Since the text never exists in a vacuo, it can be evaluated in relationship, actual or potential, to particular readers at particular points in time and space […] Such an effort to consider texts always in relation to readers and in specific cultural situations, and to honor the role of literary experience in the context of individual lives, has powerful educational implications.[10]

So, in the act of reading, students are prone to make connections between the text and their cultural context. Khatib, too, opines that applying a reader response approach might constitute great gains for students. He writes:

> Being exposed to a reader-response approach to reading literary texts in the target language, the language learners could view reading English literature as a pleasurable and

> thought-provoking practice through which the horizon of their outlooks could be broadened. This was hoped to be achieved through using unlimited roots of self-expression, being exposed to the versatility of others' perspectives on a subject being discussed and getting to discover various touched emotions both within themselves and others.("Applying the Reader-Response Approach" 152)

So, in the act of reading, students discover the bracing-socio-historical, psychological, and cultural themes, which are interwoven in a rich textual fabric. Students are likely to get deep insights into the target culture.

For Rosenblatt, literature is more than a compendium for the author's culture; it is also a means of affirming one's cultural identity. In her words,

> Literature-the good and great literature of the past and present-is at once an intensely social and an intensely personal kind of experience. Using the socially produced system of symbols which is language, using 'the words of the tribe', the poet, the novelist, the dramatist give utterance to their most personal and yet most broadly human visions of nature, man, and society. The reader, recreating these words, living through them intensely and personally, is freed to discover his own capacities for feeling, his own sense of the world, and his relation to it ("Literature: The Reader's Role" 310)

So, reading elicits students' intellectual responses. It enables them to construct a certain attitude towards the cultural knowledge, which the text conveys.

2-1-The use of the reader's cultural background

Indeed, meaning is always constructed in relation to the reader's socio-cultural context, which interferes and impinges on the reading process. According to Iser, the reader's identity is a part and parcel of the interpretative process. In his words, "The need to decipher gives us the chance to formulate our own deciphering capacity-i.e., we bring to the fore an element of our being of which we are not directly conscious."[11] Since meaning is generated in accordance with the reader's personal and cultural makeup, the literary text is infused with different meanings, and it is open to a wide range of interpretations. This may serve as an incentive, for students, to vie for a more valid interpretation.

Rosenblatt's views on the importance of the reader's experience collide head on with those of Iser. She asserts that the literary text will cease to be

evocative if it has no relevance to the reader's experience and background. She states that

> the quality of our literary experience depends not only on the text, on what the author offers, but also on the relevance of past experiences and present interests that the reader brings to it. We all know that there will be no active evocation of the literary work, no such experience lived- through, if the text offers little or no linkage with the past experiences and present interests, anxieties, and hopes of the reader.("Literature: The Reader's Role" 305)

Indeed, in the process of reading, the reader shapes the literary work to fit the pattern of his own experience. He always tries to situate its meaning in his socio-cultural matrix, infusing the treasure- house of his experience

According to the prominent figure in reader response theory, Robert Jauss, meaning in a particular culture is determined by a set of rules and expectations. He coins the term 'the horizon of expectations' "to designate the set of cultural norms, assumptions, and criteria shaping the way in which readers understand and judge a literary work at a given time […] Such 'horizons' are subject to historical change, so that a later generation of readers may see a very different range of meanings in the same work, and revalue it accordingly."[12] Since meaning and culture are tightly linked, the student's reactions or responses to the text cannot be insulated from their horizon of expectations, which includes their shared beliefs, experiences, and literary conventions. The horizon of expectations does not merely change from one community to another; it also alters with the passage of time. Thus, even within the same community, and due to the socio-historical, literary, and cultural changes, each generation of readers articulates its own interpretation of the same work of art. Through the horizon of expectations, the reader comes to a deeper understanding both of his own culture and the socio-cultural context of the text.

Like Robert Jauss's concept of 'the Horizon of expectations', Stanley Fish, coins the term 'interpretative communities', which refers to a set of rules and assumptions, which the author employs in the act of writing. These strategies and assumptions are embedded in the author's community. Hence, within the same community, the author's intention and the reader's interpretation dovetail with each other. Fish writes:

> Interpretative communities are made up of those who share interpretative strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other

> words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way round.[13]

So, accordingly, the writer and the reader of the same community are prone to infuse a text with the same meaning since they have a set of shared rules and attitudes. Of utmost significance, the same work is received differently by different interpretative communities. Interpretative communities, according to Fish, explain "the stability of interpretation among different readers (they belong to the same community) […] Of course this stability is always temporary (unlike the longed for and timeless stability of the text) Interpretative communities grow and decline."("Interpreting the Variorum" 304) So, in the same interpretative community, meaning varies with time and circumstances.

2-2- Reading as a Crossing of Cultural Borders

Since readers of each culture have their own horizon of expectations, reading a literary text in a foreign language conjures up feelings of estrangement and of cultural distinctiveness. So, to understand the author's language and the text's multiple shades of meaning, the student is urged to investigate into the horizons of the target culture. In this sense, reading becomes an act crossing cultural boundaries.

As it has been evinced, the reader generates a meaning that befits his experience and background; however, he absorbs some of the unfamiliar things he finds in the text. According to Iser, reading "enables us to absorb an unfamiliar experience into our personal world."[14] In the process of reading, for instance, the reader comes inevitably to identify with some characters, because they provide him with a kind of vicarious life. The characters' substance, says Jean Paul Sartre, is the reader's "borrowed passions […] the writer appeals to the reader's freedom to collaborate."[15]

In the reading process, the reader adapts to a world, which is not compatible with his own. He needs to transcend the familiar world to understand, to experience, and to be involved in the unfamiliar one. Iser writes:

> The manner in which the reader experiences the text will reflect his own disposition, and in this respect the literary text acts as a kind of mirror; but at the same time, the reality which this process helps to create is one that will be *different* from his own (since, normally, we tend to be bored by texts that present us with things we already know perfectly well ourselves)[…] it is only be leaving behind the familiar world of his own experience that the

> reader can truly participate in the adventure the literary text offers him. [16]

In the interpretative process, the reader is liable to be in close vicinity to a different and unfamiliar culture. He feels impelled to imbibe and experience something he finds in the text. Iser states that in the reading process, "something happens to us" This something, he writes, is "the incorporation of the unfamiliar into our own range of experience […] the process of absorbing the unfamiliar is labeled as the *identification* of the reader with what he reads. " ("The Reading Process" 202) Iser explains 'identification' as "the establishment of affinities between oneself and someone outside oneself-a familiar ground on which we are able to experience the unfamiliar. The author's aim, though, is to convey the experience and, above all, an attitude towards the experience."("The Reading Process" 202) Thus, in the communicative act of reading, estrangement would turn into familiarity through a process of identification.

The critic E.D. Hirsch Jr states that cultures are not innate but rather acquired. This, indeed, makes the process of cultural reciprocity and exchange possible. He writes: "If all interpretation is constituted by the interpreter's own cultural categories, how can he possibly understand meanings that are constituted by different cultural categories?[…] We can understand culturally alien meanings because we are able to adopt culturally alien categories. […] Cultural subjectivity is not innate, but acquired."[17] So, the flexibility and fluidity of cultures make it possible for readers to assimilate cultural aspects, which are not consonant with their own.

2-3- Interpretation as an act of Transaction/Interaction

So far, the present paper has vindicated that applying a reader response approach to literary texts helps students decrypt and explore the underlying cultural assumptions of the author. It has also evinced the pivotal role of the reader and the experience he brings to the interpretative act. Since reading brings together the experience of the author and that of the reader, it follows that meaning is located in the in-between. In fact, reading literary texts permits a dialogue between cultures.

Rosenblatt points out that in the act of reading, the binary opposition reader/text (author) undergoes a process of deconstruction. Hence, the convergence of the reader and the text brings meaning into existence. In her description of the relationship between the text and the reader, she draws the following analogy:

> Much discussion of literature seems to imply that communication is a one-way process. The author, we say, communicates to the reader. The reader is thought of as approaching the text like a blank photographic film awaiting exposure. Actually, the reader and the text are

> more analogous to a pianist and a musical score. But the instrument that the reader plays upon is-himself. His keyboard is the range of his own past experiences with life and literature, his own concerns, anxieties, and aspirations. (“Literature: The Reader’s Role”304-05)

During the act of reading, there emerged a liminal space between the author and the reader. Rosenblatt states that in the reading process, the reader “enter[s] into communication with the author. Only through a recasting of his own experience can he share the writer’s mood, his vision of man or society or nature. ” (“Literature: The Reader’s Role” 305)

For Rosenblatt, literary experience is a ‘transaction’, “during which each […] is continuously affecting the other. I suppose ecology is the field in which people understand this best--that human beings are affected by the environment, but they are also affecting it all the time, so that there is a transaction going on. ” (“Louis Rosenblatt Interview” 7) So, transaction suggests the reader’s connection with the external social and cultural world. The process of reading opens a dialogue between the author and the reader, who make use of their experience when transacting with each other. Rosenblatt states:

> Both writer and reader are drawing on personal linguistic/experiential reservoirs in a to-and-fro transaction with a text. Both writer and reader develop a framework, principle, or purpose, however nebulous or explicit, that guides selective attention and directs the synthesizing organizing process of constitution of meaning. However, these parallelisms occur in very different contexts or situations. We should not forget that the writer encounters a blank page and the reader an already inscribed text. Their composing and reading activities are both complementary and different. [18]

Rosenblatt’s reader-text transaction challenges the dualistic mode of thinking promoted by Western culture. It deconstructs the binary opposition text (author)/reader, allowing a symbiotic nourishing relationship. In the reading process, and during the transaction between the reader and the text, the “sharp demarcation between objective and subjective becomes irrelevant. ”(<u>The Reader, the Text, the Poem</u> 18) According to her, “the boundary between inner and outer world breaks down.” (<u>The Reader, the Text, the Poem</u> 21)

In Iser’s parlance, meaning is generated through an “interaction” between the text and the reader. According to him, “If the virtual position of the work is between text and reader, its actualization is clearly the result of an interaction

between the two, and so exclusive concentration on either the author's techniques or the reader's psychology will tell us little about the reading process itself."[19] For Iser,

> the literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic, and the aesthetic: the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the aesthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader. From this polarity it follows that the literary work cannot be completely identical with the text, or with the realization of the text, but in fact must lie halfway between the two. ("The Reading Process" 189)

So, meaning is always located in the in-between. It is neither exclusively determined by the intention and attitudes of the author nor by the experience and assumptions of the reader. Instead, meaning is constructed out of the fusion of the reader and the text.

In the act of reading, the reader transgresses the finitude of his culture. Like that of Rosenblatt, Iser's theory of reading is anti-dualistic. In his words,

> If reading removes the subject-object division that constitutes all perception, it follows that the reader will be 'occupied' by the thoughts of the author, and these in their turn will cause the drawing of new 'boundaries' […] In thinking the thoughts of another, his own individuality […] is supplanted by these alien thoughts, which now become the theme on which his attention is focused. As we read, there occurs an artificial division of our personality because we take as a theme for ourselves something that we are not. Consequently when reading we operate on different levels. For although we may be thinking the thoughts of someone else, what we are will not disappear completely-it will merely remain a more or less powerful virtual force.("The Reading Process" 203)

In other words, reading removes the firmly established cultural boundaries between the reader and the author. The reader finds in the text things, which he accepts and even assimilates. However, this does not imply that the reader will forsake his own culture. Rosenblatt urges the reader to affirm his cultural identity and its distinctiveness despite the existence of hybridity. She suggests 'cultural pluralism' as "a much better term than multiculturalism, because it emphasizes the pluralism but it also emphasizes the idea of diversity within unity."("Louis Rosenblatt Interview" 9) T.S. Eliot spells out a very approximate idea as follows:

> to understand the culture is to understand the people […] Such understanding can never be complete either it is abstract-and the essence escapes-or else it is *lived* ; and in so far as it is *lived*, the student will tend to identify himself so completely with the people whom he studies, that he will lose the point of view from which it was worthwhile and possible to study it […] What we ordinarily mean by understanding of another people, of course, is an approximation towards understanding which stops short at the point at which the student would begin to lose some essential of his own culture" (Notes Towards a Definition of Culture 41)

So, in the reading process, the student becomes cognizant of the existence of similarities and differences between his own culture and that of the author. He finds a space that he and the author might share. At the same time, there are differences that preclude the reader's culture from erosion; these are the divergences which keep each culture unique and distinguished from the other. According to T.S. Eliot, "in the relations of any two cultures there will be two opposite forces balancing each other: attraction and repulsion-without the attraction they could not affect each other, and without the repulsion they could not survive as distinct cultures." (Notes Towards a Definition of Culture 61).

Very much like Rosenblatt and Iser, Stanley Fish states that meaning emerges from the "interaction between the text, conceived of as a succession of words, and the developing response of the reader"("Is There a Text in this Class?" 3) According to Fish, the meaning of the text lies between the intention of the author and the experience of the reader. He states that

> the efforts of readers are always efforts to discern and therefore to realize […] an author's intention. I would only object if that realization is conceived narrowly, as the single act of comprehending an author's purpose, rather than […] as the succession of acts readers perform in the continuing assumption that they are dealing with intentional beings. In this view, discerning an intention is no more or less than understanding, and understanding includes […] all the activities which make up what I call the structure of the reader's experience. To describe that experience is therefore to describe the reader's efforts at understanding, and to describe the reader's efforts at

> understanding is to describe his realization […] of an author's intention.("Interpreting the Variorum" 297)

In the same vein, Ferval Çubukçu asserts that "meaning is no longer seen to reside exclusively in the text, a static, structured, iconic representation that it is the task of the reader to extract. Rather, meaning is seen to result from an encounter between the reader and the text, an encounter in which meaning is not so much discovered as it is created."[20] So, to read is to take a stance towards what the author says. Meaning results from a transaction between what the author says and how the reader interprets it.

The post-structuralist critic Roland Barthes, in turn, considers the text as a hybrid made of complex intertextual weavings. He states that the "text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. "[21] In fact, Roland Barthes's theory of the 'death of the author' is a daring attempt to efface the image of the author as the only repository of the text's meaning. In his view, the text has multifarious layers of meaning. Reading helps students know not just about one culture but about all the cultures that the text makes reference to.

3-Teacher's and students' roles

The teacher's role in the reader response approach is a very important one. To engage his learners in the literature class, the teacher must encourage them to make use of their background knowledge. He must be a facilitator of reader-text transaction. Unfortunately, the traditional method of teaching literature is still rife in our universities. Literary texts are always interpreted by the teacher, who assumes that the text has a monolithic correct interpretation. Students are not given voice to give their own interpretations. Question exams are still given in the form of multiple choice questions. Rosenblatt criticizes this archaic method of teaching literature as follows: "Reading was taught as a set of disparate skills to be demonstrated largely through answering multiple- choice questions. Stories, and even poems, were often used for that purpose. Literature […] was taught with the assumption that there is a single 'correct' interpretation (often according to Cliff's Notes!)" ("The Transactional Theory"378) Indeed, this method of teaching is embedded in a banking conception of education in which the role of the teacher is to 'spoon feed' the learners, who are passive consumers and recipients of the teacher's ideas and the cultural attitudes they find in the text. This method of teaching literature stifles students' creativity and makes their critical thinking ooze away in the mist of time.

Teachers must tergiversate their teaching method whereby they give an ideal interpretation of the foreign culture and ascribe a single meaning to the text, which always parrots the one intended by the author himself. So, teachers should prevent students from being slaves to the York notes, which represent the critical views of others. Students need to be convinced that the literary text needs readers not readings. They might read the York notes just to see the variety of interpretation and compare between many points of view. Many students become accustomed to the habit of reading the York notes instead of the literary work itself. Teaching literature must be product-oriented: reading and understanding implies rewriting the text. In other words, literature might be a very effective means to develop students' critical thinking and enhance their motivation because students learn better if they feel that they are responsible and that their opinions are valued.

Çubukçu states that the teacher should make herculean efforts to apply reader- response criticism in the class. In support, he argues that

> Using specific response statement assignments that address cultural, historical, phenomenological, and structuralist concerns can integrate new literary theory into the classroom by showing students that they are already aware of many of the issues it addresses. It may take a few weeks to convince students that they have assumptions, that these assumptions are culturally acquired rather than innate, and that they are really of interest in the classroom, but once they do recognize this, […] students gain confidence in their own ability to analyze the linguistic, historical, and cultural forces underlying their experiences of texts. The classroom, therefore, becomes a scene of expansion of ideas rather than repression of ideas. "("Reader Response Theory" 71-2)

So, it is better to get rid of the multiple choice questions, which are likely to restrict and limit students' freedom of expressing their critical views. Instead, teachers ought to give open questions that will lead to a variety of responses.

In addition to raising students' awareness of others' behavior, attitudes and values, teachers should encourage their students to question and criticize the cultural ideologies implied in the literary texts. They can even impel their students to find and deconstruct the prejudices and stereotypes, which they might find in the text. In their transaction with another culture in the reading process, students should avoid the blind imitation of the cultural aspects embedded in the text. A

selection rather than a slavish imitation or a total rejection must be encouraged. In this context, Rosenblatt writes:

> The successive editions of *Literature as Exploration* have maintained my linking of reader-response theory with the need for readers to be critical of the assumptions embodied in the literary work as experienced and also of the culturally acquired assumptions they themselves brought to the transaction. But a critical attitude does not demand a swing to a completely negative or deconstructive approach. In the 80s, I have repeatedly felt the need to insist that to be truly critical is to be selective. ("The Transactional Theory" 385)

So, the students' task should be that of evaluation and criticism. However, criticism should not amount to a total rejection of another culture. Instead of complete acceptance or rejection, selection is the moderate stance.

Conclusion

To round off, reader response approach to literary texts is a valid and adequate theory to teach culture in the Algerian Universities. Therefore, it must be an integral part of the literature class. Through the act of reading, students acquire cultural knowledge of the target community. Reading, also, enables them to construct meaning in relation to their cultural context. Of utmost importance, literature opens dialogues between cultures and enables students to cross cultural borders. Learner-centered approach and reader-response theory can be validly combined by giving students voice to express their personal responses to the text, which include their experiences and cultural background as well as their attitudes towards the foreign culture. Teachers can make the act of reading a joyful experience through which students enter new worlds and connect to other cultures.

Endnotes

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